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SUBJECT: GHANA AT 50: SETTING THE SCENE - JUBILEE...NOT  
JUBILATION

ACCRA 00000285 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: PolChief Scott Ticknor for reasons 1.4 d and e.

11. (C) Summary: This is the first in a series of reports looking at Ghana at 50, intended to be scene setters for the official delegation which will be visiting this year. On March 6, Ghana will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary as Sub-Saharan Africa's first independent country. The mood so far has been reflective rather than openly celebratory. Ghana has emerged from a turbulent history into a period of stability, democracy and sustained economic growth. Nonetheless, many Ghanaians are disappointed that the country has not lived fully up to its promise. Persistent poverty, political divisiveness, corruption, and governance and security challenges undermine Ghana's achievements. While many Ghanaians view stability as the country's most significant success, they do not regard continued stability as a given. End summary.

President Kufuor Launches Golden Jubilee  
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12. (U) Ghanaian President John Kufuor's 2007 New Year Message, which officially launched the Golden Jubilee celebrations, presented a hopeful but generally sober picture of Ghana. It reflected some of the underlying insecurity and disappointment Ghanaians feel about the country's slow path to development.

13. (U) Kufuor noted Ghana's main challenges in 2006: high oil prices, road and boat accidents, narcotics trafficking, an increase in violent crime, and power shortages. These developments "failed to destabilize the society and economy to the extent that was feared," he concluded, crediting the openness of social discourse, efficient macro-economic management and a "gradual but steady improvement in law and order." He cautioned that "programs and projects of development take time to mature," and that "in light of this appreciation of maturation" 2006 was successful.

14. (U) Speaking of the Golden Jubilee, Kufuor highlighted the "solemnity of the celebrations". He called on Ghanaians to rejoice for having "managed to pull together as a nation" despite periods of uncertainty and hardship. He praised the country's democratic constitution, rule of law and good governance, offering that "we have come to a stage which the world is acknowledging as promising for success."

Ghana's Troubled Beginning

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15. (U) Like President Kufuor, many Ghanaians will view the Jubilee through the sober lens of the country's tumultuous history. On Christmas eve in 1957, nine months after independence, President Kwame Nkrumah proclaimed "our country is stable politically and the rule of law is plainly established for all to see. The fundamental rights of the citizen... are secure. If there are still people abroad who doubt the practice of democracy in Ghana, I invite them to come here and see for themselves."

16. (U) Within a year, Nkrumah had abolished regional assemblies, banned ethnic, religious and regional parties, and put in place a Preventive Detention Act used to imprison thousands of his opponents. By 1960 he had created a one-party state and declared himself Life President.

17. (U) The following decades brought five military coups and numerous coup attempts, a revolution, thousands of human rights abuses, and almost two decades of economic decline nearly ending in financial ruin. There were also periods of serious violence, including the 1979 execution of three former heads of state, the 1982 murder of three Supreme Court judges and a retired army major, and the 1994 "Guinea Fowl" ethnic war in the north which left an estimated 2,000 dead.

#### Building Stability

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18. (U) Perhaps ironically, Ghana's current stability is in large part a product of this turbulent political history. Kwame Nkrumah's socialist vision and lack of ethnic bias helped build a unifying sense of Ghanaian nationalism in the early days of independence. He extended education to disadvantaged northern areas and ensured the civil service drew from and rotated jobs in all regions of the country. He

ACCRA 00000285 002.2 OF 002

was willing to forge compromises, helping create a conciliatory tradition. Nonetheless, Nkrumah was ultimately a divisive figure who left a legacy of centralized politics, suppression of civil liberties, corruption, and economic collapse which laid the groundwork for years of political instability.

19. (U) The credit for stabilizing Ghana goes more to former President J.J. Rawlings. Despite his autocratic style, human rights abuses and early revolutionary tendencies, over a period of almost twenty years he led Ghana through a democratic transition which ultimately steadied the till in Ghanaian politics. He strengthened grass roots organizations, empowered the judiciary and gradually reduced the role of the military. He created a system of local government and forged a new constitution. He allowed political party competition, private media development, and competitive elections. Faced with economic disaster, in 1983 he embraced IMF-led economic reforms which eventually increased food security, improved social infrastructure and strengthened the stake in stability of many sectors of society.

110. (U) President Kufuor built on this stability, strengthening civil liberties and governance institutions, further opening the political space and improving the economy. In 2004, he initiated a National Reconciliation Commission, which helped move the country beyond its sometimes violent past.

#### Comment

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111. (C) Many Ghanaians do not have a good explanation for Ghana's current stability. Some point to cultural factors, arguing that Ghanaians are inherently conflict-averse. Some argue that elite boarding schools created a sense of national

cohesion. These explanations are incomplete. In our view, the shadow of Ghana's turbulent history is a much stronger factor. Ghanaian adults remember the years of queuing for basic commodities in the mid-1980s, the days when the military committed human rights abuses with impunity, and the 1979 revolution in which university students proclaimed "let the blood flow." As a result, Ghanaians are less likely to demonstrate or turn to violence. Stability is a product of history, including the evolution of Ghana's democracy and economy, which will be discussed septels.

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